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SUBJECT: MANHASSET III: ALGERIAN READOUT

Classified By: Amb. Zalmay Khalilzad. E.O 12958. Reasons 1.4 (B&D).

11. (C) Summary: In a January 10 meeting, the Algerian delegation to Manhasset III told NEA/DAS Gordon Gray and NEA/I Chris Ross that the Moroccans had arrived with and had maintained a negative attitude, that positions of both sides had hardened and yet Personal Envoy van Walsum, asserting his authority for the first time, had managed to force the parties to engage at length, if not in substance, on issues such as confidence-building measures, the shape of municipal government in the Western Sahara and the nature of self-determination. Moreover, van Walsum had obtained agreement on the time and place for the fourth round: March 11-13 at Manhasset; and had secured concurrence from the parties for his first visit to the region since the beginning of negotiations, tentatively scheduled for early February. The Algerians do not expect much of an interim report from van Walsum at the end of January but will expect both a substantive report and some sign of progress by the April MINURSO mandate renewal. Algeria continues to insist that it wants closer relations with Morocco and that the current frost in the relationship dates back to Morocco's unexplained and rude cancellation of the Algerian Prime Minister's visit to Rabat -- a visit Bouteflika had personally arranged with Mohammed VI. Algeria continues to maintain it does not insist on an independent Sahrawi state -- only the exercise of self-determination by the people of Western Sahara. End Summary.

12. (SBU) NEA/DAS Gordon Gray and NEA/I Chris Ross met January 10 with Algerian Foreign Affairs Secretary Ramtane Lamamra, former Algerian UN PermRep and current Presidential Adviser Abdallah Baali and Algerian PermRep Yousef Yousfi at the Algerian Mission to the UN to receive their readout of the January 7-9 Manhasset III negotiations.

13. (SBU) Lamamra, who headed the delegation, began his readout by noting that five months -- far too long a period -- had passed since Manhasset II and many events that impacted the negotiations had occurred in the interim. The elections in Morocco and the subsequent elevation of the Moroccan junior Foreign Minister (Taib Fassi Fihri) to be Foreign Minister and the 12th Congress of the Polisario Front and subsequent articulation of policy resulting from that meeting were two such key events. In the interim the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council had both adopted consensual resolutions on Western Sahara, though the process for the Security Council resolution had been somewhat difficult and the Polisario and Algeria had worried that the Security Council might attempt to predetermine the outcome of negotiations. In the end, however, UNSCR 1783 looked very much like UNSCR 1754 and the third round was able to proceed.

14. (SBU) Lamamra said that Manhasset II had ended with Algeria feeling that there had been little substantive discussion and that something had to be done. In Manhasset III, Personal Envoy Peter van Walsum tried to address that problem by asserting his authority, setting the agenda and attempting to promote substantive dialogue by posing questions. Lamamra reported that van Walsum had proposed three subjects for discussion: confidence-building measures (CBMs), thematic, and the implementation of Security Council resolutions. On CBMs, Lamamra said, Morocco had been extremely negative and had taken the position that the only CBM would be to allow refugees to return from Tindouf to the territories by creating a large opening in the berm through which refugees could pass. For its part, the Polisario had insisted on a discussion of human rights in the territories where, it asserted, oppression had reached intolerable levels. Lamamra said that van Walsum had indicated that human rights would be on the agenda of the next set of negotiations. On thematic, Lamamra said, there had been some discussion of "municipal government," but none on "justice" or "resources." Again, van Walsum had suggested that the next round would include discussions of those two issues. On "implementation," Lamamra said, very little was said. Only the Polisario said anything -- that it was ready to accept autonomy provided it were one of the several options from which the people of Western Sahara were given the opportunity to choose, i.e., given the opportunity to exercise the right of self-determination.

15. (SBU) Lamamra said that the parties have agreed to date and venue for the next round of talks: March 11-13 at Manhasset. Lamamra also said that van Walsum plans to travel to the region (Rabat, Tindouf, Algiers and Nouakchott in that sequence) in the second week of February. Finally, Lamamra

said that Algeria did not and would not expect much of an interim report from van Walsum at the end of January, but that by the April MINURSO renewal, van Walsum will need to provide a substantive report that demonstrates some progress.

Atmospherics

16. (C) Lamamra said that although the New Year usually brings with it hope, the Moroccans came to Manhasset with reservations and hostility: they were very reserved with the Algerian delegation and outright hostile to the Polisario delegation. Lamamra noted that the Algerians and the Moroccans sat at the same table only once and that the Moroccans and the Polisario never dined together during Manhasset III. Ambassador Baali added that he was particularly surprised at the attitude of the CORCAS representative at the negotiations. He said that the CORCAS representative did not even say "Good Morning," to the members of the Algerian delegation whom he knew well. Moreover, Morocco had used very harsh language with the Polisario in its opening and closing statements and, for the first time, had used very strong language with the Algerians. For instance, Morocco had referred to Algeria as "the other party," and had said that "Algeria is hanging with the same past views." Morocco had also referred to Algeria as "those who really control the fate of the people of Western Sahara." Baali said that the Moroccan closing statement had been provocative, but that for the sake of the negotiations, Algeria had decided not to respond. Lamamra speculated that the lack of cordiality might have been purposeful -- that the Moroccans were possibly providing material for acrimonious media exchanges. Van Walsum, Lamamra said, had begun the meeting by pointing out that the delegations had tended to speak too much to the media, creating both a negative atmosphere and trying to create a sense of fait accompli.

17. (C) Lamamra said that at Manhasset III, Moroccan Security Chief Mansouri had spoken for the first time at length and, while not accusing the Polisario of terrorism, had suggested that some people in the camps may be involved with terrorist groups. The Polisario had responded that coordination of

activities to combat terrorism with Mauritania and Algeria was key and that they were ready to cooperate with Morocco and MINURSO. Lamamra said that the Moroccans had never raised terrorism as an issue in the negotiations before and that the occurrence would have to be reported to Algiers immediately, adding that if the Moroccans really were serious about terrorism, they should be open to the "joint patrols" CBM that MINURSO has been pushing for the past year.

18. (C) Ambassador Baali said that that van Walsum had made a strong attempt to assert his authority. But because he had not provided an agenda prior to the talks, he found it difficult to get the parties to engage. But, Baali said, van Walsum seemed pleased with the outcome of the talks. Van Walsum had told Algeria that both sides had hardened their positions but that he had learned a great deal and that the exchanges had been "rich." Van Walsum was very pleased that the parties had spent five hours on the Tuesday session arguing, if making little progress. Baali said that the personality of the Personal Envoy was an important issue and the fact that van Walsum had decided to assume his responsibilities was very important. The fact that van Walsum was already talking about a fifth round of talks was an indication of his new determination to resolve the impasse. In this light, Baali said, van Walsum's proposed visit to the region could be very positive if the parties are prepared to discuss substance. Baali cautioned that van Walsum would need to bring ideas for discussion as the views of the parties are well known.

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19. (C) Replying to Gray's invitation to comment on the Algerian-Moroccan relationship, Baali replied that there was no real improvement -- that the only real cooperation was on terrorism and security issues -- and that no breakthrough was expected any time soon. King Mohammed VII had phoned President Bouteflika following the recent bombing, but that was the extent of it. Lamamra added that an issue standing in the way of better relations was the Moroccan cancellation -- without any subsequent formal notification -- of the Algerian Prime Minister's scheduled 2005 visit to Rabat. The visit had been personally negotiated between Bouteflika and Mohammed VII and its cancellation in such a way was what Baali termed "a slap at Algeria." Lamamra insisted that Algeria was sincere in its desire to improve relations with Morocco, a fact substantiated by the appointment of an ambassador to Rabat who was clearly on the record supporting close relations with Morocco.

110. (C) Replying to the Gray's concern about the long-term viability of an independent Sahrawi state, Baali and Lamamra noted that the Western Sahara was blessed with many natural resources at the disposal of a relatively small population and that problems of security and the like could be dealt with in the framework of an interdependent Western Saharan state established in a creative fashion. Baali reminded that Algeria, since its recognition of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in March 1976, has not insisted on independence -- only on the exercise of self-determination. It had extended recognition -- and Bouteflika had been Foreign Minister at the time -- valid only until the people of Western Sahara were able to exercise their right of self-determination and to determine its future.

111. (C) Baali said that Algeria's U.S. friends must understand that the Moroccan view (autonomy) is a non-starter and that given the geo-political position of Western Sahara in African politics, autonomy is dangerous and would be destabilizing. At a minimum, South Africa and Nigeria would oppose it. Baali concluded with the comment that even before Baker, the U.S. was the country on which Algeria relied to preserve balance on the Security Council in the Western Sahara impasse, and Algeria now needed the U.S. to return to its position as honest broker.

KHALILZAD